

Chapter 5

A Year of Mini-Lessons for Growing Writers

When thinking about a year of writing lessons, we need to give equal weight to craft, conventions, genre, and writing process. There is often a temptation, when teaching very young children, to overemphasize one of these areas and not give enough attention to the others. Many primary teachers (especially with the onslaught of early childhood testing) feel it's their responsibility to get all of their kids producing clean products, that is, sentences with capital letters, punctuation, and attention to conventional spelling. Certainly we can hothouse our youngest writers, getting them to produce something that looks good on the page, but these modeled sentences, which often entail copying, have very little to do with real writing. So, yes, we need to teach conventions—but not make them the standards by which we measure all writing progress.

At the other end of the spectrum are teachers who celebrate young students' ideas but are loathe to ask primary students to revise. Again, I feel the need to emphasize that revision is *not* correcting "mistakes" by copying work over to a clean draft—I, too, disagree with this practice. These teachers often have come to view suggestions for revision—adding details, changing order, crossing off

Chapters 4 and 5: Mini-Lessons That Build Independence and A Year of Mini-Lessons for Growing Writers

Discussion Questions

- Jennifer writes: “It’s important to say that your students’ writing development—their needs—should drive your planning.” What does this planning look like? How do you follow a sequence of instruction and at the same time allow your students to influence the direction of the writing curriculum?
- The organizing principle of mini-lessons in this book is the six traits of writing. What guides the sequence of your writing instruction? Do you focus on one or two skills at a time, or do you present the “buffet method” of writing?
- Jennifer writes: “Too much emphasis on conventions will prevent your students from becoming fully engaged, independent writers.” Do you agree? How do we teach conventions, and help our students to apply them, without overemphasizing their importance?
- Five instructional strategies are presented on page 56. Which of these strategies are you currently using? Which one(s) would you like to try or use more?
- One strategy for providing students with a vision of success is projecting and discussing writing samples (not your students’ writing). Where can you find these samples to share? How can you work as a group to pool resources?
- Have you tried any of the mini-lessons in these chapters? What were the results?

Group Activity

Although it’s nice to have lists of suggested mentor texts, often the books on the list are not in the school library, or it’s difficult to guess how the person who chose the book actually used it with students. Instead of relying on lists alone, consider choosing books that you know and love to model fine writing. Examine the picture books you brought to this meeting and identify the ways in which these books could be used as mentor texts. Take turns giving a three-minute presentation of the books and the traits you would highlight.

Before the Next Meeting

- Choose one of the mini-lessons from these chapters (preferably one that uses a technique that’s new to you) and try it with your class. Be prepared to share your results at the next meeting.

or the classic "bed to bed" story, in which writers share information about their characters' days from the time the characters wake up to the time they go to sleep at night. I don't present the pattern of three in one mini-lesson, but divide it into a series of lessons that not only help students write with increased attention to organization but also improve their reading comprehension. The next five lessons build an understanding of the pattern of three (and the ones that follow will assist students in writing successful endings).

Students in the primary grades should not all be expected to apply these lessons in the same way. For most kindergarten students, you are exposing them to ideas that will build their understanding of literature and story, but may not be directly applied to their own storytelling (in the same way that we practice compare and contrast or cause and effect before students are reading text that requires these necessary comprehension skills). Most first graders will eagerly apply the lesson concepts to class interactive writing but may or may not be able to bring the pattern to their own writing. The majority of second graders will begin to use these concepts in their narratives with astonishing success.

(For an introduction to organization for primary students, see "Focus: How Will I Organize My Writing?" on page 73).

Introduce the Storyboard

On Hand: Blank white paper that can be folded in quarters or storyboard graphic organizers (Figure 5.7)—one for each student.

Mini-Lesson: If you teach kindergarten, you may be wondering how to help your students transition into writing longer narratives. Draw or project a storyboard. Model the telling of a story in frames. Keep your story fairly simple, recording each event with illustration, words, or both in sequence. Modeling a story in this way tends to be enormously motivational. Suddenly your kindergarten students are writing stories with multiple events. (Note: Avoid modeling the superhero story. Kindergartners gravitate toward retelling cartoons, which result in a good deal of pseudoviolence.)

First- and second-grade students benefit from prewriting with storyboards. Model their use as a story planner. Sketch your story in the boxes. Then use the first frame to guide the writing of the first para-

Figure 5.7
Storyboard from
The Big Book of
Reproducible
Graphic Organizers
(Scholastic, 1999)

Names: _____ Date: _____

Book Title: _____ Author: _____

STORY BOARD

Draw or write the events of the story on the story board. Record them in the correct order.

The storyboard consists of six rectangular boxes arranged in two rows of three. The boxes are numbered 1 through 6. Box 1 is top-left, 2 is top-middle, 3 is top-right. Box 4 is bottom-left, 5 is bottom-middle, 6 is bottom-right. To the left of the bottom row, there is a cartoon character of a painter wearing a hat and overalls, holding a paintbrush and standing next to a paint can with a star on it. The character is pointing towards box 4.

graph of your story. Let students know that the storyboard is *not* the full telling of the tale; it is a tool to help them think their stories through from beginning to end. Recommend that they conference with you while in the storyboard stage. Discussion often helps students bring more structure and depth to their stories.

Because of the developmental stage of primary students, or because students are familiar with graphic stories similar to those in comic books, several students will view the planner *as* the story. In other words, they will not be inclined to retell it with greater detail on paper. That's okay. There is value in sequencing a story, and what they learn through this exercise will be applied as they continue to explore story structure.

Extension: Suggest students retell their reading selections using a storyboard.

In the Beginning

On Hand: A handful of books you have read aloud in the past year in which the main character is easily identified.

Mini-Lesson: The beginning of most stories (whether they follow the pattern of three or not), introduces a character who wants something. Encourage students to think of stories they have read or heard and ask, "Who is the main character? What does the main character want?" Students adore answering these questions. The experience is akin, I believe, to getting the questions right on Jeopardy. Once they get going, they don't want to stop. Here are some possible answers:

Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes (1991): Chrysanthemum wants a new name.

Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale by Mo Willems (2004): Trixie wants Knuffle Bunny.

Little Pea by Amy Kraus Rosenthal (2005): Little Pea wants to avoid candy.

Are You My Mother? by P.D. Eastman (1960): Little Bird wants its mother

Story is about yearning. We keep turning the pages because we become invested in the character's desire and want him or her to succeed. By simply knowing what their characters' want at the beginning of a story, students will write with more purpose and their stories will take on more shape.

You might post a list of some of the things literary characters strive for. Suggest that your students begin a story with a character who wants something.

Extension: Suggest students look through your classroom library in search of book pairs: two characters who want similar things. Here are some possible pairings:

- Olivia and Fancy Nancy want glamour.
- Brave Charlotte and Adventure Annie want adventure.
- McDuff and Hermit Crab want a home.

Pattern of Three

On Hand: *Moon Sandwich Mom* by Jennifer Richard Jacobson (1999) or any other picture book that follows the pattern of three (see sidebar).

Mini-Lesson: Your students have come to recognize that a story often begins with a character who wants something. Does this mean the character gets



Titles Organized by the Pattern of Three

Bootsie Barker Bites by Barbara Bottner (1992).
Gator by Randy Cecil (2007).
Mrs. Toggle's Beautiful Blue Shoe by Robin Pulver (1994).
Wemberly Worried by Kevin Henkes (2000).
The Wild Woods by Simon James (1993).
Virginnie's Hat by Dori Chaconas (2007).

what he or she wants right off the bat? No way! (Not unless the character, like King Midas, is meant to learn to be careful of what one wishes.) No, typically the character:

1. Tries to get what he wants and fails. (That's right: failure is an important part of story.)
2. Again tries to get what he wants. And you know what? Again he fails.
3. Musters all his resolve and often succeeds on the third try (or after the third failure) to get what he wants—or he changes his mind. Either of these endings can work.

Ask students to look for this pattern as you read the story aloud.

Extension: Ask students to think of all the stories that have three in the title (*The Three Little Pigs*, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, *Three Wishes*) and help them to see that they also follow a three-act structure.

Writing a Story Together

On Hand: Chart paper and a marker.

Mini-Lesson: For second graders, you could do this mini-lesson for one or two days, modeling story development. For kindergarten and first grade, I suggest allowing this mini-lesson to carry over a full week. In doing so, you will have composed a class story that can be published or performed.

Each day, write one section of an interactive story that follows the pattern of three. Begin by coming up with a character and determining what the character wants. On the first day, write a paragraph that *shows* what your character wants. Point out that writers don't merely tell readers what a character wants they let us share in the wanting.

For example, don't write:

Mandy wanted a dog.

Instead, write:

While walking home from school, Mandy heard footsteps behind her. She turned to see who was following. It was the dirtiest, mangiest dog she'd ever seen. The dog had black matted fur, and one torn ear, but it was wagging its tail as if to say, "I'm so glad I found you!"

The next day, determine what the character is going to try and how she is going to fail. Be careful not to list: "Mandy asked her mother if she could have a dog, but she said no." Instead, *show* the scene. When Mandy's mother says that Mandy is not responsible enough to have a dog, our character knows what she needs to try or prove next.

Invite students to write their own stories with the pattern of three as you continue to model. By the fifth day, your character will either succeed in getting what she wants or she will change her mind.

Extension: Suggest students search your collection for books that demonstrate the pattern of three. You might designate one book bin for these titles.

Cutting Up the Bones

On Hand: An underdeveloped story (see below), scissors, tape, and five sheets of paper.

Mini-Lesson: Even though you have spent months discussing the need for quality details, even though you have spent a week modeling the development of story, even though you have read aloud fabulous literature, you will still have students that list:

Mandy wanted a dog, but she didn't have the money. First she tried a lemonade stand, but that didn't work. Then she tried doing chores, but that didn't work. Then she decided to work at the pet store. She made lots of money and got to buy a dog.

Use the text above to model this great revision technique. Point out to students that this piece is organized, but it lacks details. It definitely does not create a movie in the mind of the reader.

Tell students that you are going to do “surgery” to separate the bones of the story. By separating the bones you will make room to add the body. Cut the five sentences apart and tape each one to the top of a clean sheet of paper. Using the beginning of the story, demonstrate how you would expand:

Mandy wanted a dog, but she didn't have money. Mandy knew that dogs were expensive because she visited the pet store every day. There, she had fallen in love with a little Scottish terrier puppy. The puppy jumped up and down in its cage as soon as Mandy arrived. “I have to figure out a way to make money,” said Mandy. “I have to!”

Extension: Later, during writing conferences, suggest that students who have listed conduct surgery. Invite students to share their successful revisions the following day.

Reflective Endings

On Hand: Several books that have endings that mirror the beginning, such as *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox (1985), *Tacky the Penguin* by Helen Lester (1998), and *Miss Bridie Chose a Shovel* by Leslie Connor (2004). (See the sidebar for other suggestions.)

Mini-Lesson: We know that when a story follows a pattern of three, the character either gets what he wants in the end or changes his mind. But these endings—like all endings, no matter what the organizational pattern or genre—have an additional job. There has to be a beat at the end of the piece, a moment that allows the reader to respond with an “Ah,”

an “Ah” that means I am so glad I read this work. Reflective endings (also known as circular, loop, or wraparound endings) are one technique that helps to create this feel-good moment.

Tell students that you are going to read the beginning and ending of each book and you would like them to see if they can detect a pattern:



Titles with Reflective Endings:

Do Kangaroos Wear Seatbelts? by Jane Kurtz (2005).

Diary of a Worm by Doreen Cronin (2003).

Rotten Ralph by Jack Gantos (1976).

My Mama Had a Dancing Heart by Libba Moore (1995).

The Paper Boy by Dav Pilkey (1996).

The Relatives Came by Cynthia Rylant (1985).

Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge

Beginning: "There was once a small boy named Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge and what's more he wasn't very old either."

Ending: "And the two of them smiled and smiled because Miss Nancy's memory had been found again by a small boy, who wasn't very old either."

Tacky the Penguin

Beginning: "There once lived a penguin. His home was a nice icy land he shared with his companions. His companions were named Goodly, Lovely, Angel, Neatly, and Perfect. His name was Tacky. Tacky was an odd bird."

Ending: "Goodly, Lovely, Angel, Neatly, and Perfect hugged Tacky. Tacky was an odd bird but a very nice bird to have around."

Figure 5.8
Primary Writing
with a Reflective
Ending

Fishy and his mom
Fishy said to his mom,
lets play hide and seek
no Fishy said Fishys mom
so Fishy ran away. late that
nite he was lonely. he went
back to his house and got
his teddy bair. he he opind
the dor. Fishy calld Fishys
mom, where are you. he
ran out of the house
with his teddy bair
he jumt in the boshis
Fishys mom side
she saw the market out
mov she wacet the boshis
bush. I am sorry said Fishy
we are sort of playing hide
and seek. Mom. they said Fishys
late.

Miss Bridie Chose a Shovel

Beginning: "She could have picked a chiming clock or a porcelain figurine, but Miss Bridie chose a shovel back in 1856."

Ending: "She could have had a chiming clock or a porcelain figurine, but Miss Bridie chose a shovel back in 1856."

Students will notice, of course, that the endings use words or exact phrases from the beginnings. The reason these reflective endings are so effective is that the reader is invited on a journey and then delivered home again.

Invite students to try out reflective endings in their own work.

Extension:

Draw two bookends on the board. (I often find that students are unfamiliar with bookends. Review their purpose if necessary.) Write a beginning above the first bookend, such as: "George Washington was our first president." Write a reflective ending above the second bookend: "Everyone agreed. Only George Washington could be our first president." Erase your model. Write another beginning above the first bookend. Challenge students to come up with a reflective ending.

After trying this a few times (and perhaps going in the reverse direction) invite kids to come up with both beginnings and reflective endings. See Figure 5.8 for a student sample.

Book Bag Endings

On Hand: Approximately twenty books from your classroom library that you and the students have already read, sticky notes, five or six cloth book bags, duct tape, and a permanent marker.

Mini-Lesson: In October you focused on beginnings; now it's time to do the same exercise with endings. Remind students that they have examined books with reflective endings and encourage them to look for other techniques authors use—techniques that might help them with their own endings. Read some of the endings from the books you gathered and look for similarities. It's essential that you explore books that have been previously read, or neither the power of the ending nor the technique used will be fully recognized. Allow students to come up with their own names for the technique. They might include techniques like the following:

- “Repetition,” in which language, not just the beginning, is repeated (*Library Lion* by Michelle Knudson [2006] and *Chicken Joy on Redbean Road* by Jacqueline Briggs Martin [2007])
- “Joke Endings,” in which the last page provides a giggle (*The House Takes a Vacation* by Jacqueline Davies [2007], *Dream Hop* by Julia Durango [2005], *Ping Pong Pig* by Caroline Jayne Church [2008])
- “Happy Endings,” in which we trust that life will be fine (*Granite Baby* by Lynne Bertrand [2005] and *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Bolts [2007])
- “Surprise Endings” (*Terrific* by Jon Agee [2005] and *King Bidgood's in the Bathtub* by Audrey Wood [1993])

Once you've determined categories (sticky notes can help you keep track), use a strip of duct tape and a permanent marker to label the bags with the categories. Encourage students to add to the bags when they find books that fit.

Extension: Suggest that students examine their own work and list the types of endings they've used.

April

Focus: How Do I Write Poetry?

April is National Poetry Month and the perfect time to revisit voice. It is through poetry that many a writer (particularly struggling writers) experience the power of their own words. Those who sometimes feel daunted by the complexity of thought (How can I tell everything that happened?) and the vastness of the page (How long does it have to be?) experience enormous freedom when encouraged to select evocative words and place them in stanzas. Through poetry, our students are able to convey big thoughts; we get a glimpse of the deep emotional terrain they navigate even when they are not yet able to fully articulate their deep thinking.

Primary students often equate poetry with rhyming, and although many poems do rhyme, I do not recommend you focus on this particular style. Why? Creating meaningful rhyming poetry requires both a broad vocabulary and dexterity with words. Typically, when young children focus on word endings, they sacrifice both fluency and poignancy. We get a sort of meaningless word play:



Recommended Poetry

Butterfly Eyes and Other Secrets of the Meadow by Joyce Sidman (2006).

A Curious Collection of Cats by Betsy Franco (2009).

Doodle Dandies: Poems That Take Shape by J. Patrick Lewis (2002).

Here's a Little Poem: A Very First Book of Poetry edited by Jane Yolen and Andrew Fusek Peters (2007).

Hip Hop Speaks to Children, edited by Nikki Giovanni (2008).

Inside Out: Children's Poets Discuss Their Work by JonArno Lawson (2008).

A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms by Paul B. Janeczko (2005).

A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams by Jen Bryant (2008).

Speak to Me (And I Will Listen Between the Lines) by Karen English (2004).

There Is a Flower at the Tip of My Nose Smelling Me by Alice Walker (2006).

Thunderboom! Poems for Everyone by Charlotte Pomerantz (2006).

I saw a dog.
Sitting on a log.
With a hog.

And although this does create a fun image, the words bounce right off us. Opportunities for connection are lost.

Instead, be explorers of poetry. Don your binoculars and take a close look at author's craft. How do authors arrange words in free verse? What do they do with line breaks, white space, and font? What types of words do they choose? How do poems tickle our senses, our thoughts, our emotions?

Begin, of course, by reading lots and lots of poetry. Okay, go ahead and read some Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky,

but again—be careful not to focus too heavily on this one type of humorous, rhyming deliciousness. (You might save these books for the end of the month). Check out the books recommended in the sidebar for some fabulous models.

Once you begin your exploration of poetry, I bet you'll conclude that a month isn't nearly enough.

A Poem Is a Photograph

On Hand: *Speak to Me (And I Will Listen Between the Lines)* by Karen English (2004) or other poetry that speaks to the lives of your students, and photographs of familiar sights for students: backpack, cafeteria, school bus, playground, desk, sidewalk, and so on.

Mini-Lesson: Read *Speak to Me* (or your selected poetry book) and then reread it from beginning to end. (*Speak to Me* is about six urban kids and it begs to be read over and over again.) Take a moment to ask students what they observed about the poetry. They may make connections: "I have a pen with pink ink like Rica," or "I felt like Brianna when Siobhan didn't want to be my friend anymore." Or they may begin to notice that a poem can be long like "Walking Home Makes Me Feel Good" or incredibly short like "Five More Minutes and I Get to Go Home":

Five more minutes and I'll get to go home
What else is there to say?

Tell students that whereas a story or a personal narrative has a beginning, middle, and end—a poem can be compared to a photograph in which a single moment (and all of its meaning and ensuing emotion) is captured in time. Show them the photographs you have collected and choose one to model the first draft of a poem:

Brand new composition notebook
Smelling like fresh air
A place for my name
White pages, blue lines
Not yet marred by
Wobbly letters,
Misspelled words,

Crossed off thoughts.
 My words
 Not yet placed on the pages
 Still sparkle in the breeze

Make any changes that occur to you. (My last line was originally "Still glow," but I crossed it off and explained to students that I wanted to use an image that connected to my line: "Smelling like fresh air.") You might spend time later revising your poem. If so, share your revisions during author's chair or another mini-lesson.

Invite students to use the photographs you've collected to write their own poems.

Extension: Suggest students bring in their own photographs from home to inspire their poetry.

Observing Poets Observing

On Hand: *Song of the Water Boatman & Other Pond Poems* by Joyce Sidman (2005).

Mini-Lesson: This award-winning picture book presents a poem and a scientific paragraph for each of the pond subjects. Consider the following full-page spread on peepers. On the left-hand side we read a poem that begins with this stanza:

Listen for me on a spring night
 On a wet night
 On a rainy night,
 Listen for me on a still night,
 For in the night I sing

And on the right-hand page we read these first two sentences of a paragraph:

The sound of spring peepers is one of the earliest signs of spring. These inch-long tree frogs can freeze almost completely in winter because of special "antifreeze" in their cells.

This text is best digested slowly, so you might want to conduct this mini-lesson over several days.

Write a chart of observations about the poems. The chart might look something like the one in Figure 5.9.

Figure 5.9
Poem Observation
Chart

Observation	Example
Some poems repeat words.	"Peck, peck/Crackle, crackle/Fluff, fluff"
Sometimes the words create a picture.	"L e a p l i n g"
Poets use stanzas and break up sentences. Sometimes the lines begin with a capital letter and sometimes they don't.	"Here kicks the frog with golden eyes that gulps the bug that nabs the nymph"
Some first lines of poems begin with the same word.	"Here hang" "Here floats" "Here nods"
There is lots of space around some of the poems.	"Smart young caddis worms select only"
Some poems rhyme and some do not, and some poems do both.	"Song of the Water Boatman" does both.

Extension: Invite students to choose a subject they know a great deal about and write a poem pertaining to that subject. If you made a list titled "Things We Know About," as suggested on page 52, you might want to take a moment to review it and add any new interests that come to mind.

Most Amazing Thing

On Hand: Whiteboard

Mini-Lesson: On your whiteboard write the prompt: "The most amazing thing I ever saw was . . ." Invite students who do not have a topic to give this one a try. This is a particularly powerful prompt producing unforgettable opening lines: "The most amazing thing I ever saw was my father eat a ladybug . . ."

Extension: Compile the poetry in a class book.

Where I'm From

On Hand: The poem "Where I'm From" By George Ella Lyon (you can find it online).

Mini-Lesson: In this poem, George Ella Lyon shares specific details from her past that have helped to define her. Read the poem to students. Here are a couple of my favorite lines from the second stanza:

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls
and the pass-it-ons,
from Perk up! and Pipe down!

Model writing your own "I am from" poem, perhaps beginning with the concrete and including what others have said to you:

I am from birch trees and chickadees
from dry your hair with the canister vacuum hose—reversed
I am from the Not now's, Not here's, You will never be's
And do you expect to be happy all the time? (yes)

Invite students to write their own "I am from" poem. Suggest they draw first—the prewriting will help them pick out concrete details and "hear" the voices that are a part of their everyday lives.

Extension: Introduce other poems as scaffolding. You might use Paul Janeczko's book *A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms* (2005), which demonstrates twenty-nine forms, or simply choose a favorite poem and challenge students to write one using the same pattern.

Found Poetry

On Hand: An article (perhaps from your weekly student newspaper) or a nonfiction passage you have read for science or social studies prepared to project, a whiteboard, chart paper, markers, and index cards (a small stack for pairs of students).

Mini-Lesson: Project a passage of text, such as this one from *Owen and Mzee: The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship* by Isabella Hatkoff, Craig Hatkoff, and Dr. Paula Kahumba (2006).

As the weeks went on, Owen and Mzee spent more and more time together. Soon, they were inseparable. Their bond remains strong to this day. They swim together, eat together, drink together, and sleep next to each other. They rub noses.

Ask students to pick out words or phrases they find particularly powerful. Together, arrange these words into a poem. Feel free to add words to enhance meaning. Here is an example:

Owen and Mzee
Together
Inseparable bond
Swim together
Eat
Drink
And sleep
Together
They rub noses
Owen and Mzee

Play with the line breaks and word order. Let students know that there are many possibilities. Invite them to work in pairs and choose their own texts. Have them record words that particularly speak to them on cards, and then use the cards to arrange the language into a poem. (Remind students that they might want to leave some of the cards out.) Encourage those happy with their poems to copy them down on paper. Figure 5.10a and 5.10b show a student's poem before and after revision.

Extension: Suggest students find words that appeal to them in magazines, cut them out, and then, perhaps adding to those words, arrange them in a poem.

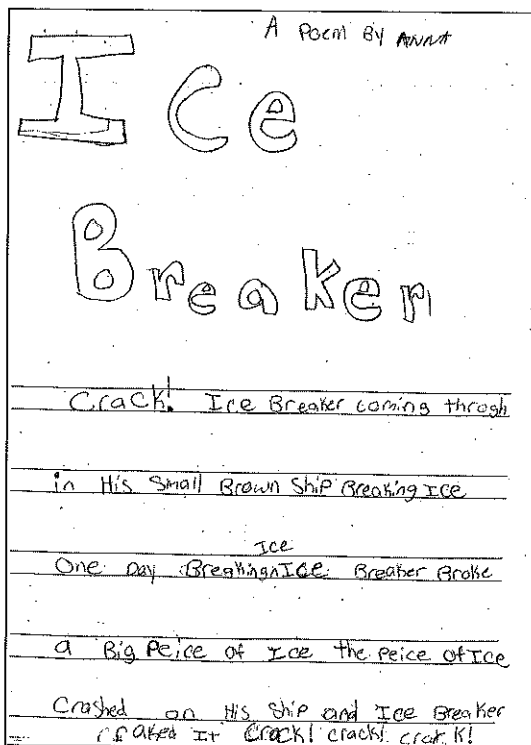


Figure 5.10a

In her first version, Anna records her ideas in a familiar prose pattern. She includes onomatopoeia, but shifts to narrative style with "One day."

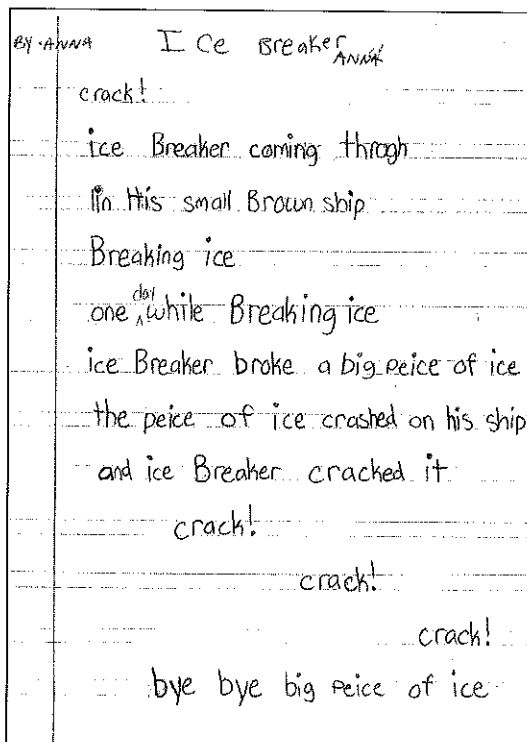


Figure 5.10b

Anna uses line breaks in her revisions, and although the "One day" remains, the work takes shape as a dramatic poem.

Internal Rhyme

On Hand: *River Friendly River Wild* by Jane Kurtz (2000) and/or *Banjo Granny* by Sarah Martin Busse and Jacqueline Briggs Martin (2006), or any other poems with internal rhyme.

Mini-Lesson: Young children who have already come to equate poetry with rhyming words may loathe giving up end rhymes. Encourage these students to use internal rhymes, as Jane Kurtz does when describing sandbagging during a Red River flood:

Wrist twist 'till the bag's closed

or as Busse and Martin do in their lyrical picture book:

*He was a baby who went wiggly, jiggly, and all-around giggly, and
tip over tumble for bluegrass music . . .*

Point out the playfulness of internal rhyme and how lovely it sounds to the ear. Suggest students try including internal rhyme in their poetry.

Extension: The poetry in *River Friendly River Wild* came from Jane Kurtz's own experience of losing her home in the flooding of the Red River Valley (on her birthday no less). As she coped with the tasks at hand, she stopped to record the details that are included in these poems. Invite students to think of an experience they've had and suggest they brainstorm a list details and then compose a poem from their memory list.

Word Play

On Hand: Whiteboard, marker, and a copy of the poem "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll.

Mini-Lesson: This classic poem can be found online, in poetry anthologies, in picture books, and where it was originally published in its entirety: *Through the Looking Glass*. It's interesting to note that Lewis Carroll (real name Charles Dodgson) wrote the first verse when he was a child—subsequent verses were developed when he was playing a game with his cousins. Note that in this poem the Jabberwock is slain and the boy comes galumphing back with its head. You may want to say that you're making an exception to your "no violence" rule (if you have one) so students might see what this amazing poet could do with word-play. If you are simply too uncomfortable, you might share just the first two verses:

The Jaberwocky by Lewis Carroll

ˆTwas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.
ˆBeware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!

Read the poem aloud with much expression. Point out to students that poets often use rhyme in poetry, but there are many other ways to play with words as well. Carroll created many of the nonsense words in *Jabberwocky* by combining words. Two of the words galumphing (*gallop* and *triumphant*) and chortled (*chuckled* and *snort*) have made it into the English dictionary. Choose a word such as *slithy* and have students guess which words Lewis combined. (He combined *slimy* and *lithe*, but students might also suggest *slippery*, *slithery*, and others.)

Now write an action sentence on the board ("The bear walked down the path," for example) and, with students, play with the words:

The Grizlout grambled down the troad.

You get the idea. Tell students that inventing words is a favorite activity of many poets as well as writers of other genres.

Extension: Reread the poem while students are sitting at their desks. Encourage them to draw an illustration of the Jabberwock. They may also wish to include the Jubjub bird and the Bandersnatch in their pictures. Afterward ask, "What words from the poem helped shape your creatures?"

Repeating Letter Sounds

On Hand: Poem containing alliteration and/or consonance, such as Dennis Lee's "Silvery": "Silverly/ Silverly,/ Over the/ Trees/ The moon drifts/ By on a/ Runaway/ Breeze."

Mini-Lesson: Project the poem or write it on chart paper so students can examine it.

Tell students that writers often choose to use lots of the same letter sounds in their poetry to create a certain effect. (Alliteration is repetition of the same beginning consonant sounds: Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds elsewhere in words—frequently at the end of words. Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds.)

Dennis Lee's poem is a lullaby so it's not surprising that he used a good deal of words that either begin or end with the *s* sound—similar to the *shhh* sound a mother makes to quiet her child. Ask students to count the number of times they hear the *s* sound. Point out that it's not

the actual letter they are looking for, but the sound. The word *breeze* provides an *s* sound.

Invite students to try this technique in their poetry.

Extension: Share the poem “In Bed With Cuddly Creatures” by Wes Magee: “Who’s tucked up with me in bed?/ Peter Panda/ and Foxy Fred.” The poem goes on to name all the animals whose names are alliterative. Both this poem and the Lee poem mentioned above can be found in a fabulous anthology: *Here’s a Little Poem: A Very First Book of Poetry* edited by Jane Yolen and Andrew Fusek Peters (2007).

May

Focus: How Do I Choose the Strongest, Most Effective Words?

Focusing on strong word choice is a wonderful way to wind down the year. Attention to word choice will help students integrate what they’ve learned during the school year and will strengthen several of the other traits as well: ideas, voice, and fluency.

In December you inspired a love of words, introduced onomatopoeia, and identified lively verbs. This month students will be given the opportunity to reinforce that knowledge and will also look at precise nouns, shades of meaning in adjectives, and specific vocabularies.

Words, Words, Words

On Hand: Whiteboard, marker, and copies of brainstorming graphic organizer.

Mini-Lesson: Share with students the prewriting strategy of brainstorming words that *might* appear in new work. This will help them to tap into their specific vocabularies and spend extra time thinking about strong verbs and sensory words.

Choose one of your areas of interest. For example, I would choose tennis, pool, knitting, cooking, rock climbing, or dogs. Introduce your topic and write a key word at the top of the board. For example, I might say, “I want to write about my struggle with learning to knit,” and write the word, *knitting*.

Now draw a three-column chart:

Knitting		
Things	Actions	Place (create a movie)
Needles	Knit	
Yarn	Purl	Cozy living room
Directions	Cast on	Couch
Loops	Drop a stitch	Smell of wool
Fingers	Wrap	Chatter from friends
Knots	Count	
Holes	Tear out	
	Help	
	Practice	
	Untangle	

Bounce from column to column, filling in the words that come to you. Model how the recollection of one word helps you think of an action. For example, the word *knot*, makes me think of *untangle*. Share your observations of the process: "When I record my words, I not only think of better words—words that create a picture—but I also begin to plan my piece." (You may want to cross words off your list right then and there. I substituted *chatter* for *talking*, for instance.) Remind students that you may not need all of the words and that you'll continue to choose the words that work best.

Offer a copy of the brainstorming graphic organizer for those students who would like to prewrite by brainstorming words. Place extra copies in the writing center. (Note: one benefit from this prewriting exercise is that primary students really stay with a piece, developing their ideas as they weave in the words.)

Extension: After reading a picture book, ask students to complete the same three-column chart, this time recalling the memorable words the author used.

Pirate Talk

On Hand: *How I Became a Pirate* by Melinda Long (2003)

Mini-Lesson: Tell students that many subjects have a special vocabulary. List several words and see if your students can identify the topic:

- scales, gills, fins
- hoop, dribble, jump shot
- neck, strings, bow

Encourage students to provide lists of words and have classmates come up with the subject. Remind students that when they use specific words like these, their writing is more captivating, more believable.

Show students the mentor text, *How I Became a Pirate*. Tell them that Melinda Long's book is made all the more enjoyable because of the use of pirate talk. Read the story, inviting students to give a thumbs-up every time they hear specific pirate language.

Extension: Other books that model the use of specific language are *Jingle the Brass* by Patricia Newman (2004) (train language) and *A Good Day's Fishing* by James Prosek (2004) (fishing terminology).

Substituting Better Words

On Hand: Whiteboard, marker, and chart paper.

Mini-Lesson: On the chart paper write the following sentence:

They went into a store that smelled and saw lots of things.



Time to Bury the "Said Is Dead" Chart

Believe it or not, most professional writers wouldn't be caught dead using all those synonyms for *said*. "The word *said* is invisible," an editor told me after reading a manuscript of my first picture book, "Use *said* whenever possible." It is commonly accepted that the overuse of *replied*, *commented*, *exclaimed*, and *shouted* is a sign of an amateur. (Sometimes writers use synonyms that are terribly unlikely. Try giggling a sentence, for example.) Students will pick up the occasional synonym from their reading (great!) and will from time to time wish to indicate a whisper or a shout, but try not to encourage the scattering of *said* synonyms.

Ask students to discuss the quality of the words chosen in this sentence. Help them to understand that the language is too vague. Ask questions like these: How did they go into the store? What kind of store? What did the store smell like? What were the things they saw?

On the board, make a four-box graphic organizer (see Figure 5.11). With students, brainstorm a list of more precise verbs and more specific nouns. Let them know that it's often best to name schools, streets, stores, and so on, even if they wish to make up a name. Naming gives a piece more voice and a sense of validity. Students, in their eagerness, will often offer a type of

Figure 5.11
Specific Word
Choice

Went	Store
Raced Sprinted Trudged Marched Snuck Sauntered Skipped Flew Wandered	Home Depot Stop and Save Martha's Fudge Shop Handy Andy's Get and Go Second Time Around
Smelled of	Things
Vanilla Bacon Sawdust Chocolate Moth balls	Ponchos with fringe Hammers Orange marshmallow peanuts Dusty pickle jars Ripe cherries

store: candy store. Show them that the name "Martha's Fudge Shop" is far more fun and evocative. When students suggest clothing for things, invite them to be even more specific: ponchos with fringe, red cowboy boots, pants covered in pockets.

Once you have filled your graphic, have students work in pairs to create enticing sentences:

They raced into Home Depot, which smelled of sawdust, and saw a wall of hammers.

They snuck in Martha's Fudge Shop, which smelled of chocolate, and saw rows of orange marshmallow peanuts.

After you have revised sentences, you can also tweak the remaining verbs for *smell* (*reeked, stunk, wafted*) and *saw* (*spotted, noticed, glimpsed, glazed, glanced, observed, stared*).

Extension: Read Chapter 5 of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling (1998)—in particular, the description of the apothecary in Diagon Alley:

[Hagrid and Harry] visited the Apothecary, which was fascinating enough to make up for its horrible smell, a mixture of bad eggs and rotted cabbages. Barrels of slimy stuff stood on the floor; jars of herbs, dried roots, and bright powders lined the walls; bundles of feathers, strings of fangs, and snarled claws hung from the ceiling.

Tightening Sentences

On Hand: Whiteboard and a marker.

Mini-Lesson: Occasionally, post sentences on your whiteboard and ask students to both tighten and liven them by using more specific language. Here are some examples:

The animal doctor walked slowly away from the hospital.
(The vet trudged away from Cumberland Animal Clinic.)

Big dogs had fun in the city square.
(Great Danes frolicked in Central Park.)

Ask students to take a closer look at their writing to see if there are places where they could tighten or substitute vivid words.

Extension: Ask students to hunt for sentences that they admire in picture books. Then invite the class to “melt the sentences down.” In other words, ask them to take lively language and turn it into the banal, as students did with this sentence from *Nothing Happens on 90th Street* by Roni Schotter (1999):

Mr. Chang was arranging fish fillets in his newly opened Seafood Emporium.

Rewrite:

A man was working in a new fish shop.

Shades of Meaning

On Hand: Whiteboard and a marker.

Mini-Lesson: Brainstorming a list of substitutes for vague, generic words (such as *walk* and *nice*) can be difficult for students at any age, but especially

Mini-Lesson: Share with students several “What am I?” or “Who am I?” riddles. Point out that riddles have *word referents*, which are words that refer to something without naming it.

Model the brainstorming of word referents. Choose an answer for a riddle, such as cat, and write a list of possible referents. (Although students may offer suggestions, write your own ideas so no one will be offended as you select two or three referents to become part of your riddle.)

Whiskered
Four paws
Pointed ears
Long tail
Purring pet
Meowing mammal
Mouse pouncing
Kibble eating
Fur ball

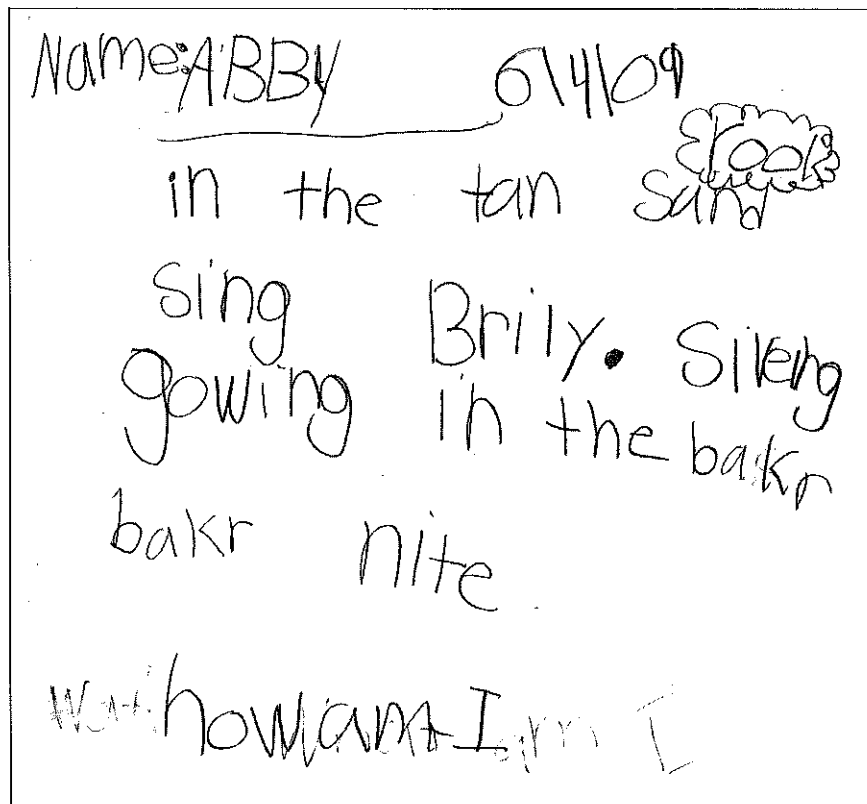
Then, using these referents, write your own riddle. Demonstrate the need to choose only your *best* ideas. Think out loud as you write your riddle: “I won’t use four paws, because so many animals have four paws. And I think I won’t use *meowing mammal*. Even though I like the alliteration—those two *m*’s together—*meowing* makes my riddle too easy. I do like *purring* though, and may use it near the end of my riddle. Oooh, I just had an idea for making my riddle fun. I’m going to repeat the word *on*”:

Whiskers on face
Pounces on mice
Purrs on lap
What am I?

Reinforce the idea of brainstorming many ideas before choosing the ones that work for your riddle. Figure 5.12 is an example of one student’s riddle poem.

Extension: Invite students to bring in “mystery” objects in paper bags. Allow students to take turns providing clues while classmates guess what’s inside.

Figure 5.12
Abby's Riddle



In the tan sand
shining brightly. Silvery
glowing in the dark, dark, night
Who am I?
(a rock)

unnneeded information—as negative criticism. But successful writing requires the understanding that writing is all about making choices. We try something, it may or may not work, but we know that we can make changes; our writing can always be improved. This is the foundation for risk taking essential for writing growth. Young children should play with their writing in the same way they might play with sand or clay. Revision should always be honored, applauded, celebrated: He is a writer for he is the one who revises.

Unfortunately, I can't map out a clear scope and sequence for teaching conventions and revision. The timing of these lessons should always be differentiated, dependent upon the unique developmental needs of your students. I suggest giving daily attention to print through your morning message, with occasional mini-lessons that focus on conventions and revision as your students show readiness for them. And remember, every time you model writing you are modeling conventions along with the trait discussed. What I can give you is a suggested sequence for the teaching of craft and genre, but even these suggestions should be treated as a loose outline. If in October, for example, you have students who have begun to write "choose your own adventure stories" and classmates want to join in, I certainly would follow their lead with mini-lessons on crafting story. After all, nothing supports writing growth more than passion.

One thing is for certain, whether you teach kindergarten or second grade: Your primary students are very different writers in September than they are in January. First-grade teachers have always talked of the big leap that seems to occur right after winter break. Emerging writers have moved from letterlike symbols to connecting letters to sounds. Transitional writers, through a combination of phonemic and conventional spelling, are expressing multiple ideas in sentences. Fluent writers are making increasingly sophisticated choices in craft. Because our students' skill sets are so different in the beginning of the year compared to the end, I suggest spiraling writing content—that is, introducing an important skill such as incorporating quality details in September, and then spending significant time revisiting the same skill four months later.

So, this chapter is a map of sorts. A GPS, perhaps. One you follow while always listening for the ever-present voice that tells you, "recalculating." Use the mini-lesson ideas that follow, but remember that it's *always* your students' work that should dictate the direction of your instruction. Allow their needs and interests to steer the course. In

addition to lessons on conventions, don't forget to include lots of opportunities for students to examine writing samples and to discuss whether or not the qualities of good writing are present—whether the goals of the author have been successfully achieved. And although you never want to use your students' work as negative examples, do invite students to demonstrate good writing techniques during your instructional time.

In the previous chapter, I provided mini-lessons for the first month of the year: lessons that helped students become familiar with writer's workshop, and the trait of ideas. In October we'll take a peek at organization and some informational writing.

October

Focus: How Will I Organize My Writing?

When it comes to teaching primary students about writing and organization, we've tended to stick to the concept of a beginning, middle, and end. (Much to our amusement, our concrete thinkers don't hesitate to point to the top of the paper, the middle, and the bottom as if to say, "See? My writing has all three.") And yes, we teach our youngest writers to begin their pieces in a manner that will grab the reader (a skill presented this month) and to give their writing a satisfying ending, but I believe there is a greater knowledge we can share with primary students; that is, all writers *choose* the manner in which they organize their writing.

This seems like such an obvious concept, but I do believe we inadvertently teach students the opposite. We seem to imply, as soon as we think students are ready, that there is one way to organize writing: the five-paragraph essay. And all organizational techniques, such as the hamburger paragraph, a technique no professional writer would *ever* limit himself or herself to using, seem to lead to this one pattern of organization.

Now, I have nothing against teaching students different organizational structures; the more structures they know, the more patterns they have to choose from. But what is essential is that they understand that most writers first ask: "What do I want to write about?" And then, once the topic has been decided: "How do I want to organize this piece?" They don't crowbar their writing into one "correct" form, but ask, "How can I best communicate this information? What would be

the clearest, most helpful, most entertaining and, sometimes, most original way?"

The ideal writing program allows for a balance of discovery when it comes to organization and the teaching of different organizational structures. I suggest that with young children, we begin with discovery—helping them to recognize an author's organizational structure—and later teach them an organizational pattern or two (in this book we revisit organization in March). The mini-lessons at the beginning of October introduce primary students to the concept of organization, help them recognize organizational structures, and help them consider arranging information in useful ways. The mini-lessons at the end of the month ask students to pay attention to lively leads, beginnings that grab the reader and refuse to let go.

Remember, you are introducing students to the idea of organizational structures. I do not recommend that you show students a form and then ask that each and every one of them complete fill-in-the-blank sentences or apply the same structure to their writing. Organizing one's writing, like selecting an idea, is a skill that requires thinking, choice, and practice. When a young student runs up to you and says, "Look! I'm using the *Now and Ben* pattern," [from the book *Now and Ben: The Modern Inventions of Benjamin Franklin* by Gene Barretta (2006)], only my book is "Me as a Baby, Me Now," you'll know that you've empowered your students to organize their writing from a genuine place of understanding.

Introducing Organization

On Hand: One of your own pieces, written without attention to organization and ready to be projected on the board or a screen.

Mini-Lesson: When ideas are presented willy-nilly, the audience has difficulty following our thinking or our story. Share one of your pieces with a lack of cohesive organization. Here is an example:

Oh, no! I slid off the inner tube and swam back to shore as quickly as I could! When I finally turned to face the beach, my brothers looked like little action figures. Once, I sat on an inner tube and floated in the sea.

Ask your students, "Does this make sense?"

When they share their confusion, show them how you revised to give the piece an understandable beginning, middle, and end:

Once, I sat on an inner tube and floated in the sea. When I finally turned around and faced the beach, my brothers looked like little action figures. Oh, no! I slid off the inner tube and swam back to shore as quickly as I could!

Talk about the importance of organization and tell students you'll be taking a closer look at how authors organize their work in the weeks to come.

Extension: When I share my writing, students inevitably ask, "Is this real?" I will often listen to their questions and return a day or two later with yet another revision:

When I was eight, my family and I spent a day at the beach. I begged my younger brother to let me use his inner tube and finally, he gave in. I couldn't have been happier, sitting on that floating island, staring out to sea. I drifted with sailboats and seagulls. Suddenly, I heard someone calling. Spinning the tube around, I realized I had gone quite a distance. My brother looked like an action figure in a far away land! I slid off the inner tube and wildly swam toward shore. My arms tired and I had to let go of the inner tube, but I finally reached the beach. My brother was so relieved. He may have lost his inner tube, but he still had a sister!

How Did the Author Organize the Work?

On Hand: *Carmine: A Little More Red* by Melissa Sweet (2005) or any other mentor text that has an obvious organizational structure.

Mini-Lesson: This mentor text is a retelling of *Little Red Riding Hood* organized as an alphabet book. Read the book cover to cover for sheer enjoyment. In all likelihood students will recognize the fairy tale early on. When you've completed the story ask, "How did the author, Melissa Sweet, decide to organize her telling of *Little Red Riding Hood*?"

Suggest that students might want to try their hand at writing an ABC book.



Books with Clear, Predictable Structures

First the Egg by Laura Vaccaro Seeger (2007).

Pattern: First the _____, then the _____

Now and Ben: The Modern Inventions of Benjamin Franklin by Gene Barretta (2006).

Left-hand pages show invention we use now, right-hand pages tell how Ben conceived and developed the idea.

Fortunately by Remi Charlip (1994).

Alternates fortunately and unfortunately to tell story.

That's Good! That's Bad! by Margery Cuyler (1991).

Alternates good and bad news.

Previously by Allan Ahlberg (2008).

Story told backwards.

The Great Blue House by Kate Banks (2005).

Organized by season.

Things That Are Most in the World by Judi Barrett (1998).

Repeated sentence: The _____est thing in the world is _____.

Cookie's Week by Cindy Ward (1997).

Organized by days of the week.

Extension: Begin a T-chart graphic organizer. On the left-hand side, write "Title." On the right-hand side, write "Organization." Read any of the books listed in the sidebar and ask students to point out the organizational structure.

Interactive Writing/Organization

On Hand: A mentor text that uses a clear organizational structure, such as those listed in the sidebar.

Mini-Lesson: After reading the text (you may wish to read the book earlier in the week to keep the mini-lesson brief), suggest writing an interactive story based on the text's organizational structure. For example, if you read *Cookie's Week* by Cindy Ward (1997), you might compose a classroom story based on the days of the week pattern:

On Monday the students in Ms. Patterson's class forgot to take their chairs down. They sat on the floor!

On Tuesday the students in Ms. Patterson's class forgot to change the calendar. They went to gym, but Mr. Walden wasn't there!

Extension: Try composing both fiction and informational texts using the organizational structure of favorite books with simple organizational patterns.

Making Organizational Choices

On Hand: A number of picture books about animals written and/or illustrated by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page. You may have any combination of the following:

What Do You Do with a Tail Like This? (2003)

Facts are organized by body part.

I See a Kookaburra! Discovering Animal Habitats Around the World (2005).

Animals are organized by habitat.

Move (2006).

Animals are organized (in a chain) by the way they move.

Living Color (2007).

Animals are organized by color.

Dogs and Cats (2007).

This is a flip book: one half about cats, one half about dogs.

How Many Ways Can You Catch a Fly? (2008).

Facts are organized by prey.

Mini-Lesson: Invite students to imagine that they are going to write a book about animal facts. Ask, "How might you organize your book?" List their responses. During pauses, suggest a new structure or two. This will often lead to new ideas and connections.

The number of responses your students provide will depend, of course, on their experience with literature and their practice in categorizing, but the following are just some of the answers they might provide. Animals can be organized by:

Alphabet	Habitat
Size	Color
What they eat	Species
Domesticated/wild	Nocturnal/diurnal
Hibernate or not	Number of legs
Fur, feathers, fins	Number of young

After students have generated a list of ways to organize animal facts, show them some of the ways Steve Jenkins has organized his work. Circle ideas in your list that Jenkins used and add new ones if necessary. Suggest that before students begin a new piece they ask themselves, "How do I want to organize my work?"

Extension: Suggest students search the nonfiction section of the school library to discover any other ways of organizing books about animal facts.

Model the Use of an Organizational Structure

On Hand: A selection of your own writing in which you've used a clear, simple organizational pattern. You might try one of the following:

- Ten Chores I Hate to Do (numbered list)
- Memories of My Pets (grouped by smallest to largest, species, or length of time with you, etc.)
- The Worst Day Ever (fortunately/unfortunately)

Mini-Lesson: Share your writing with students. Ask them to give you feedback using the same format as author's chair: pointing to what you have done well and then asking you questions for clarification or a discussion of author's craft. (See author's chair procedure on page 49 for more detail about the format.)

Extension: Begin a web of organizational structures. In the center, write "Organization." On the shoots radiating from the center, write organizational patterns such as "ABC," "Time Order," "Bed to Bed," "What's Good/What's Bad." From these circles, draw lines to book titles that follow the patterns. After reading books aloud, add the titles to your web in the appropriate places. Add organizational patterns as needed. Don't be afraid to make up your own names for these patterns.

Focus and Organization

On Hand: The list of "Things We Know About" (page 52), whiteboard, and marker.

Mini-Lesson: When writers take the time to consider the focus of their pieces, organization becomes much clearer. Choose one of the items from your student-generated list "Things We Know About" and ask students first to brainstorm possible focuses then to brainstorm potential ways of organizing the focused piece. Create a web on your whiteboard (Figure 5.1).

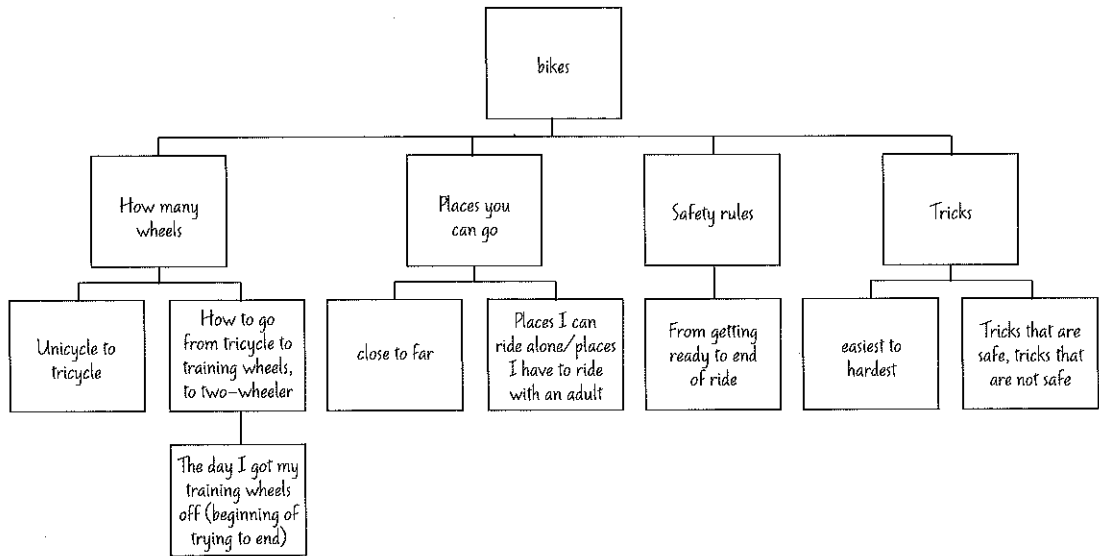


Figure 5.1
Finding a Focus

Extension: Collect a number of books about your chosen topic (in Figure 5.1, bicycles). Examine the books to determine the organizational forms.

Great Leads

On Hand: *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White (1952).

Mini-Lesson: Share with the students that E.B. White wrote eight drafts of *Charlotte's Web*. (If you haven't introduced the concept of multiple drafts, here is a perfect opportunity.) He apparently had great difficulty with the beginning (as writers are apt to do), knowing that the beginning needs to do more than set the stage; it needs to instantly engage the reader. In draft B, his story began with the description of the barn—the text that opens Chapter 3 in the published draft. Tell students that you will read Mr. White's draft B beginning and then the published beginning and that you would like them to tell you which they believe is the better beginning.

From the start of Chapter 3, read:

The barn was very large. It was very old. It smelled of hay and it smelled of manure. It smelled of the perspiration of tired horses and the wonderful sweet breath of patient cows. It often had a sort

of a peaceful smell—as though nothing bad could ever happen again in the world. It smelled of grain . . . [read to the end of the paragraph].

Then read from page 1:

"Where's Papa going with that ax?" said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.

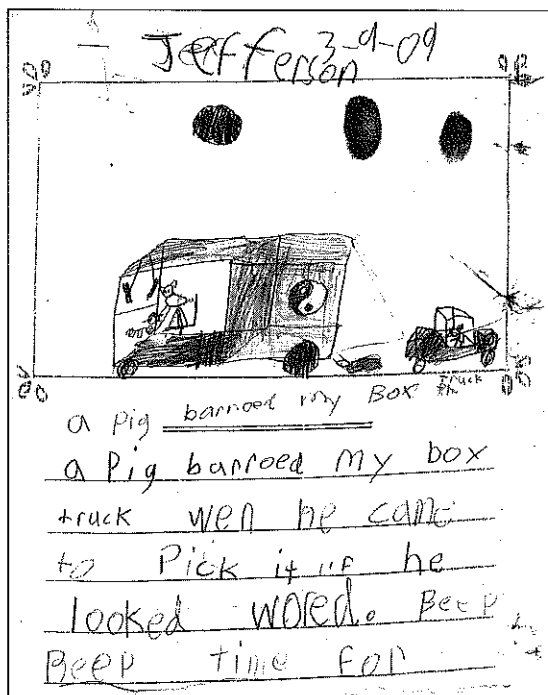
"Out to the hog house," said Mrs. Arable. "Some pigs were born last night."

"I don't see why he needs an ax," continued Fern, who was only eight.

"Well," said her mother. "One of the pigs is a runt. It's very small and weak, and it will never amount to anything. So your father has decided to do away with it."

"Do away with it?" shrieked Fern. "You mean kill it? Just because it's smaller than the others?"

Figure 5.2
Who could resist reading a piece that begins: "A pig borrowed my box truck"?



Discuss all of the reasons why the second beginning is much more effective than the first. During your talk you might point out some of the techniques authors have found effective:

- Begin with a question (and what a great question this one is!). When our brains consider a question, we read on to satisfy the longing for an answer.
- Begin with dialogue. No one ever listens to our mother's admonition to stop eavesdropping. We love to be privy to the conversations of others.
- Create a ticking clock. If Fern does not get out to that barn within minutes, a little piglet will die.

Extension: Examine beginnings in different books. Make a chart that records the lead and the techniques the authors used to capture the attention of readers.

Beginning Book Bags

On Hand: Approximately twenty books from your classroom library, sticky notes, five or six cloth book bags, duct tape, and a permanent marker.

Mini-Lesson: Tell students that you are going to read some of the leads from the books you gathered and that you would like them to look for similarities—for ways of categorizing the different leads. Students may begin to recognize some of the traditional ways we teach leads, recognizing that authors often use a question, dialogue, a sound, or description. Or they may come up with their own strategies for organizing the leads, such as the following:

- “Author talks to reader” (*Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* by Mo Willems [2003], *No Laughing, No Smiling, No Giggling* by James Stevenson [2004])
- “-est beginnings,” in which the author states a superlative: “Bella Lagrossi was the messiest monster in Booville” (*Boris and Bella* by Carolyn Crimi [2004]).
- “‘It’ leads”: “It was in the summer of the year when the relatives came” (*The Relatives Came* by Cynthia Rylant [1985]) and “It was school picture day” (*School Picture Day* by Lynn Plourde [2002]).
- “Leads that tell when”: “When Owen’s granny heard he was a baby . . .” (*Banjo Granny* by Sarah Martin Busse and Jacqueline Briggs Martin [2006]), “Not so long ago, before she could even speak words . . .” (*Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale* by Mo Willems [2004]), “When I was younger it was plain to me . . .” (*A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams* by Jen Bryant [2008]).

The excitement will grow as students begin to move the books around, deciding in which pile each belongs. Provide them with sticky notes to help them keep track. Some books will, simply because of your current pool, have no mates at all. Often students want to pull more books off the shelves; you may want to allow this to build upon their excitement, or you may want to suggest they continue to add to the bags or make new piles later. Once you’ve designated piles, place the books from each pile into a separate bag and use a strip of duct tape to label the bags with the appropriate category. Students can refer

to the bags when trying to determine how to begin a piece, or they can take turns checking the bags out and reading the books with family members at home.

Extension: Suggest that students examine their own work and list the types of leads they've used.

One Day-Not!

On Hand: Sample writing that begins with "One day" to project on a screen or whiteboard.

Mini-Lesson: Many students, eager to plunge into writing, will begin with a tried and true "safety beginning." This is simply the manner in which they begin every piece. For the kindergarten student it might be "I like." First and second graders tend toward "One day," or "Once upon a time." To help students apply what they've been learning about beginnings, project a sample of writing (again, not from your class) with a safety lead. Suggest that students rewrite the beginning using a number of strategies they have identified. For example, take the lead, "One day my grandmother came over for breakfast" and rewrite it using one of the following techniques:

Sound: *Crack! I had just broken the shell of my hardboiled egg when my grandmother came into the kitchen.*

Question: *"What's for breakfast?" asked my grandmother as soon as she arrived.*

—est beginning: *It was the silliest breakfast I'd ever had.*

Extension: Ask students to begin a new piece, but instead of writing one lead, have them write three different leads using three different strategies. They can share their possible leads with peers and then choose the one they believe is most engaging.

November

Focus: How Do I Write with Voice?

I have visited schools where well-intentioned teachers, believing that voice is a concept that is too difficult for primary children, have postponed the teaching of this trait until third grade. By now you know I oppose this thinking. Although the definition of voice can be hard to understand (granted, many professional writers disagree on the definition), voice can be easily recognized by primary students.

In fact, I believe five- to seven-year-olds come to school toting an enormous suitcase of voice, and it's our job as primary teachers to help them unpack it.

Unfortunately, we often want to take that suitcase and hide it in the supply closet. When we communicate in any way that our young students aren't ready to write, when we provide them with patterned or fill-in-the-blank sentences, when we ask them to copy sentences from the board, we are in a sense telling them that writing has nothing to do with their voices.

Instead, we should communicate from day one that our students not only have a lot to say but also have their own unique way of saying it. In other words, we should capture their natural voice on paper.

Introducing Voice

On Hand: Several picture books by Eric Carle and Jan Brett (or by other illustrators whose work is instantly recognizable).

Mini-Lesson: Introduce voice through art, beginning with picture books by Jan Brett. Show students several full-page spreads and ask them what they notice about her art. Here are some of the most common answers:

- She incorporates lots of details.
- Her work is framed—usually by borders.
- She often paints animals and seems drawn to nature.
- She provides little “windows”—glimpses of what has happened and what will happen.

Validate student responses by telling them that Jan Brett has a very distinctive artistic *voice*. That's what makes her work so instantly recognizable.

Then show them the work of Eric Carle and ask, "What can you tell me about his voice?" Students might suggest:

- His work is fanciful (pretend)—more imaginary than realistic.
- His shapes are large, bright, bold.
- He does not include a realistic background, though he sometimes fills the page with colorful shapes.
- You can see his brush strokes in some of his work.

Eric Carle has an equally distinctive voice, but one that's very different from Jan Brett's. Test students by holding up artwork by one of these two illustrators and asking, "Whose work is this?" You'll find that they don't hesitate to identify the artist.

Tell students that these illustrators have their own artistic voice and that they have a distinct writer's voice. Explain that if you are a bubbly person, chances are your writing voice is bubbly too. Or perhaps you're a fairly serious person, in which case your writing voice might be serious. Voices can be humorous, angry, laid-back—and there is a place in the writing world for all these voices.

Invite students to write with attention to voice and show their unique style. Tell them: "Your voice is as unique as your thumbprint. Put your thumbprint on your work today."

Extension: In the picture book *Why Did the Chicken Cross the Road?* by Jon Agee et al. (2006), fourteen artists offer a punch line to the age-old riddle, giving us the perfect opportunity to examine different artistic responses to the very same subject. Read the book to students and ask them to provide adjectives, from sweet to silly, to describe the tone of the visuals. Reinforce the idea that each illustrator used his or her own unique voice.

Listening for Voice

On Hand: *I Stink* by Kate McMullen (2002) or any other picture books that demonstrate clear voice, both to the ear and to the eye (in the font). (See the sidebar for more recommendations on books that play with font.)

Mini-Lesson: Read *I Stink* with much expression. After reading, show students that the author not only wrote with a fun, rowdy, He-Man voice, she also



The following books demonstrate voice in both the language and in the font design. What a concrete way to help our youngest learners grow in their understanding of voice!

A Visitor for Bear by Bonny Becker (2008).
Big Bad Bunny by Franny Billingsley (2008).
Henry and the Buckaneer Bunnies by Carolyn Crimi (2005).
Holly's Red Boots by Francesca Chessa (2008).
How to Be a Good Dog by Gail Page (2006).

showed voice in the font. Allow students to make observations of the print. Ask, "What did the author and the book designer do with the print?" (Possible responses: "At times it's bold," "It stretches," "It bounces up and down.") Ask, "Why do you think they made these choices?" Encourage students to read the words in unusual fonts with you and to use their voices in these very distinct ways.

Extension: Suggest that students play with their own print to emphasize their voices.

Feelings Included

On Hand: An expressive phrase from a story you've read, such as "Where is all this going to end?" from *Brave Charlotte* by Anu Stohner (2005).

Mini-Lesson: Ask students to take turns saying the phrase using the following voices: angry, sad, silly, whiny, happy, frustrated, serious, confused, and so on.

Tell students that adding feelings to writing often adds heaps of voice. Remind them that the words around the phrase—the details the author includes—helps us to know how to read a phrase and how the character (or in some cases the author) is feeling.

Extension: Invite students who have done a good job in expressing feeling in their writing to coteach the mini-lesson with you the next day.

Voice in Informational Texts

On Hand: *Chameleon, Chameleon* by Joy Cowley (2005) or another informational text that demonstrates lively voice.

Mini-Lesson: Read the story cover to cover for the pure enjoyment of the language and suspense. When the book is completed, reread it (this is a very

short text; if you've chosen a longer text, you might want to reread it during the next day's mini-lesson). When you reread the book, encourage the students to put their thumbs up whenever they recognize strong voice. Stop and discuss the techniques the author used, such as the following:

- Fabulous word choice: *peaceful, juicy, creeps*
- Interjections: "No food! No food!" "Zap!" "Chew, chew, gulp!"
- The way the author draws sentences out to create suspense: "Slowly the chameleon climbs down the tree, step . . . by step . . . by step. He stops."
- Using questions: "Is something hiding there?"

Help students to understand that *all* writing, whether it is a story or an informational book or article, should be written with voice.

Extension: Leave a stack of sticky notes in your classroom library on the day of the mini-lesson. Invite students to search for voice in your library's informational texts. Have them mark pages that demonstrate voice. Present those passages at the next day's mini-lesson and allow students the opportunity to tell why they chose these particular places in the text.

Recognizing Voice

On Hand: One personal story written two ways: without voice and with voice. Write the passages on chart paper or project the stories on a screen for easy viewing.

Mini-Lesson: Tell students that you have written the same story in two ways. Read the first narrative, which might be similar to this one:

There was mold growing in a container in my refrigerator. The food was spoiled, so I threw it out.

Now share the second:

I knew it was in there, somewhere. I had purchased a carton of my favorite banana vanilla yogurt, and if I wasn't mistaken, I still had

some left. Yes! I thought as I spotted it in the back. I opened the lid, eager to dive in, and spotted one of my worst enemies: refrigerator mold. Not only was it quicker at gobbling up my favorite foods than I was, but it clung to the sides of each container, refusing to be washed down the sink without a fight. I prepared myself for battle—and to gag.

Ask, “Which of these two passages has more voice?” Even the youngest of students will be able to identify the second. We may not be able to easily *define* voice, but we all recognize it when we see it.

Now ask, “How did I present more voice in the second passage?” Students will offer a variety of observations, which may include:

- You used more details. (The details an author chooses show his or her particular view of the world, and thus reveals voice.)
- The use of “Yes!” (This conveys enthusiasm and energy, both qualities of voice.)
- You said, “spotted one of my worst enemies.” (We experience voice when the author presents an idea uniquely.)
- You used more lively verbs: *purchased, spotted, dive, gobbling, clung, gag.*
- The first one sounded like this: blah, blah, blah . . . The second one was more ooh! ooh! ooh!

Extension: Take a passage (perhaps one from a favorite book) that has lots of voice and, with the students, reduce it to a few lines without voice.



Conferencing to Explore Voice

Conferencing with students can be an incredibly effective way to help students write with more voice. I often begin the conference by saying, “Please read your piece to me, and as you read, I’m going to listen for places where your unique voice comes through.” When the child has finished reading, I might point to the following:

- * Interesting use of language (“That sounds just like you!”)
- * Fabulous word choice
- * Inclusion of feelings
- * Strong sensory details
- * Use of interjections or dialogue
- * Effective use of repetition

I am reinforcing the writer’s craft, helping the student understand that all of these skills can help voice shine through. If the student’s piece lacks any voice I might say, “Let’s pick one phrase that we can work with to help you bring more voice to this piece.” When we’ve revised that section, I will try to help the student understand exactly why the change brought voice so he or she can use the technique in his or her next piece.

What Did You Learn About the Writer?

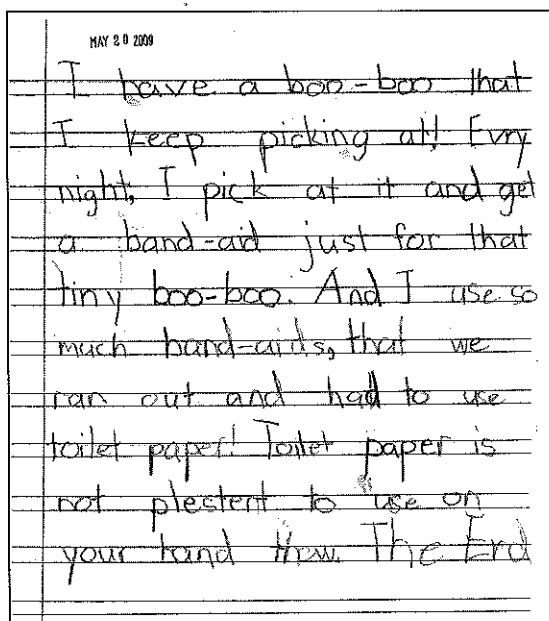
On Hand: Samples of student writing, one with voice, another without.

Mini-Lesson: Project a sample of writing that has little voice. For example:

Tomorrow is my birthday.
I am turning seven.
I am having a carnival party.

Ask, "What do you know about this writer that you didn't learn from the words?" Guide students to understand that when there is little voice, we don't learn about the author. Then project a piece that has more voice, such as the piece in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3
"I Have a
Boo-Boo"



Ask, "What can you tell me about this writer?" Students will likely come up with a range of responses, many making personal connections:

"She has a hard time breaking a habit—like me."

"She knows she doesn't need that many Band-Aids because she calls the cut tiny."

"She's funny. She has a good sense of humor."

"She doesn't like having to use toilet paper."

Tell students that when they write with voice, readers are better able to understand their meaning and feel a connection to the author.

Extension: Have students examine their own writing for voice. Which sentence(s) do they think provides the reader with added information?

Voice T-Chart

On Hand: The book *Rain Romp* by Jane Kurtz (2002) or any other book with lots of voice, and a whiteboard.

Mini-Lesson: Draw a T-chart on your board. Label the left column "Examples of Voice"; label the right column "How Author Creates Voice" (see Figure 5.4). Reread the book and ask students to stop you when they hear a phrase that brings voice to the piece. Record the phrase on the right-hand side of the chart. Then ask, "What did the author do that made this sentence stand out?" This exercise is entirely open-ended. There is no right or wrong answer when it comes to voice, but the window into your students' thinking will be very illuminating.

Figure 5.4
Voice T-Chart

Examples of voice:	How author does it:
"I don't feel shiny."	unique way of saying something
"Dad hums a snazzy jazzy tune."	writing shows enthusiasm
"No way," I say. "Noooo way."	Demonstrates attitude.
"The rain agrees with me."	New way of looking at something.

Second Person Point of View

On Hand: A book written in second person (addressing the reader as you), such as *Time of Wonder* by Robert McCloskey (1957)

Mini-Lesson: Read the story aloud. Many will simply enjoy the immediacy of second person:

*The rain comes closer and closer.
 Now you hear a million splashes.
 Now you even see the drops
 on the water . . .
 on the age-old rocky point . . .
 on the bayberry . . .
 on the grass . . .
 now take a breath—
 IT'S RAINING ON YOU!*

Some of your students, however, will grab onto this voice and run with it. What fun your students will have addressing the reader in second person. Oh, what voice those pieces will have!

December

Focus: How Do I Choose the Very Best Word?

Focusing on word choice is a favorite activity for many primary teachers, and I can certainly understand why. After examining qualities that seem as wide and expansive as a Midwestern sky (focus, organization, voice), exploring the just-right word seems downright indulgent. Not to mention rewarding. Attention to the specificity and vitality of words can transform a predictable, blah piece into one that pulses with energy.



Word Banks

Many primary teachers are attracted to individual student dictionaries: books with frequently spelled words under each letter and spaces for students to add their own. If you wish to purchase these for your students, I'd recommend waiting until the second half of the year to pass them out. Students can easily build an overdependence on the books and spend much of their writing time searching for words and only writing those words that are listed. Once students have confidence in their ability to write any word—whether they can spell it or not—and when they demonstrate an understanding that it's the message that matters most, then they are ready for word banks.

Writers are artists and words are their tools. What we want most to convey to primary students is that writers choose their words *carefully*. We want the most accurate word, the most vivid word, and sometimes the most entertaining word.

Do you remember a first day of school when you either arrived with a cache of new supplies or your teacher gave you supplies—perhaps even a box of unopened crayons? Do you remember the joy of seeing that array of colors? The perfectly

sharpened points? I want to create that kind of excitement at the beginning of this month. I want students to feel as if I've just handed them a big box of juicy, colorful words. Let the creating begin!

Modeling Choice

On Hand: A large sheet of construction paper and markers or crayons.

Mini-Lesson: Choose someone to whom you (not necessarily your class) would like to send a note. It might be a thank-you note, a birthday card, or a get-well card. Introduce your task to students and then fold the construction paper in two. Use a black marker to draw the outline of an appropriate picture on the front. Now select colors for your illustration and as you do, tell students why you are choosing them. For example, you might say: "Let's see, I want to choose the just-right colors. My friend isn't feeling well and I want to cheer her up, so I am choosing this bright pink for the teapot. Pink always makes me feel happier. Oh, and yellow—yellow reminds me of the sun, which is bright and cheerful and warm. I'll make the tablecloth yellow."

Then open the card and tell students that you want to write a note to your friend, but that you want to choose your words as carefully as you chose the colors for the picture on the front. As you write the note, think out loud to allow students to hear your decisions around word choice: "Instead of writing 'I hope you feel better soon,' I am going to choose words that are more specific and more fun. I am going to write, 'Sorry to hear the nasty flu is visiting your house. I'm sending cups of love.'"

Tell students that writers are always searching for the very best way to say something.

Extension: If you are indeed doing this lesson in December, take the traditional "happy holidays" and see if your students can't come up with some other choices for "happy": *cheerful, song-full, peaceful, unforgettable, surprising, loving, yummy*. If your students have difficulty coming up with adjectives, ask them to tell you about their favorite holiday memories. Then give the memory an adjective. This is a great way to teach vocabulary in context.

Striking Words and Phrases

On Hand: Any picture book with lively, playful language, such as *And Here's to You* by David Eliot (2004)

Mini-Lesson: Read the book to your students, then reread it. On the second reading, ask students to stop you when they hear a word or phrase that really stands out. Record the language on chart paper labeled "Words We Admire" and post the chart on the wall. Add to your list whenever you and students come across a particularly stunning word or phrase.

Extension: Do what teacher Mindy Burns does to get her students collecting interesting vocabulary. She reads *Fancy Nancy* by Jane O'Connor (2005) and then creates a "Fancy Words" bulletin board. All year long, students post dazzling words on the board and frequently incorporate the vocabulary in their writing.

Collecting Words

On Hand: *Max's Words* by Kate Banks (2006), index cards with a single hole punched in the corner (five to ten for each student), and one loose-leaf ring for each student. Optional: Old magazines, glue sticks, and scissors.

Mini-Lesson: After reading *Max's Words*, a story about a boy who decided to collect words, provide each student with ten index cards bound on a ring and invite them to begin their own word collections. Suggest that they write words they particularly love or are enchanted by on the cards. You might want to encourage them to cut words from magazines as Max did and glue them onto their cards. Encourage the students to use their cards as a resource when writing.

Extension: What are your favorite words? Have students interview family members to find answers to this question. Invite students to share the responses during the mini-lesson on the next day.

Sound Words

On Hand: *Mouse's First Snow* by Lauren Thompson (2005) or other text that uses onomatopoeia. Optional: chart paper or a whiteboard.

many high-frequency words. (Students are eager to read this story independently.) Point out that *Inside Mouse, Outside Mouse* does not have sound words. Invite students to come up with sound words to accompany the text on each page. (No need to record the words unless you wish. Students will benefit from the practice of thinking about actions and the sounds they make.)

Vigorous Verbs

On Hand: *To Root to Toot to Parachute: What Is a Verb?* by Brian P. Cleary (2001), slips of paper with verbs from the book written on them (be careful to choose actions that can be acted out in your meeting area), chart paper, and a marker.

Mini-Lesson: Choosing specific and visual verbs can transform writing. Look at the difference a verb makes to the sentence *She went into the store*:

She raced into the store.
She trudged into the store.
She snuck into the store.
She slipped into the store.

When primary students write with lively, specific verbs, their compositions pop. If you haven't introduced actions words, consider doing so with Brian Cleary's fun celebration of verbs. After reading this text, provide each of your students with a slip of paper and invite them to perform a charade of the action printed on the paper. As students guess what the action is, record their responses. When the activity is over, you'll have a "verb wall" to post in the room for reference.

Extension: Read *Mammoths on the Move* by Lisa Wheeler (2006), which is packed with lively verbs for students to enact: "Stepping, Stomping/Marching, Tromping/ Watch out Wooly Mammoths!"

"Sun Cartwheels Slowly Up the Sky"

On Hand: *Water Hole Waiting* by Jane and Christopher Kurtz (2002) or other mentor text with strong, unique verbs, whiteboard or chart paper; markers; and a sample of writing with blah verbs.

Mini-Lesson:

Read the picture book, pausing to let students visualize some of the strong verbs. For example, if reading *Water Hole Waiting*, you might stop at, "Sun cartwheels slowly up the sky, herding hippopotami." Discuss how the Kurtzes chose verbs that are unexpected but allow the reader to see the action clearly.

Now project writing that is lacking in specific, lively verbs. Your sample might be something like the following:

Yesterday I went to the park. First I went on the swings. Then my brother and I went on the seesaw. My brother got off too quickly and I went down.

After a brief discussion, circle the occurrences of the word *went*. Ask students to suggest more vivid verbs to use instead. When there is a lull in the brainstorm, wait. In all likelihood students will come up with the dazzling verbs after the more obvious ones have been recorded. Initially students might come up with "Then my brother and I rode the seesaw," but with a little time and exploration, students may offer verbs such as *balanced*, *teetered*, *flew*, or even *elevated* or *up-downed*. Primary students may not have a large vocabulary to draw from, but they do have a willingness to play with words and to see things from a fresh perspective.

Extension:

Have students circle the action words in their own writing. Invite them to choose three words they circled and brainstorm a list of alternative verbs. Then have them choose the very best words from the lists.

January

Focus: How Do I Make My Writing Flow?

Fluent writing is a delight to hear read aloud. There is a flow from sentence to sentence that engages the reader and invites him or her to come along. Fluent writers use a variety of sentence beginnings and sentence lengths, but they don't do this by focusing on grammar or by counting the number of words. They do this by ear.



Audio books are a wonderful way to keep all of your kids listening to fine writing on regular basis. I recommend purchasing MP3

players for students for use during the school day and at home. They need not be iPods. In fact, it is still easier to download books on the less expensive players. Many public libraries subscribe to a service that allows free downloads.

Primary writers who have been read to, or who themselves are avid readers, will be the first to write fluently. They are the ones who have had experience with the pacing of fine writing. They've heard writers use repetition for interest. They've learned that several long sentences followed by a halting short sentence or sentence fragment makes a point or provides punch. These students may not be able to

articulate these sophisticated techniques, but they're beginning to execute them just the same.

Therefore the most important thing we can do to support writing fluency is to read aloud. Including daily read-aloud time is essential. The more students listen to exceptional writing, the more fluent their writing will become.

A Sweet-Sounding Train

On Hand: Two samples of your own writing, one that lacks fluency and one that sings. (Write each sentence on a separate line so beginnings can be compared.)

Mini-Lesson: Project the writing sample that lacks fluency. Here is my example:

I have two little dogs.
They're named Kenzie and Hattie.
They are fun to walk.
They like to eat treats.

Tell students that this first attempt at writing chugs along like a slow-moving train—one that's about to break down. Have students bend their arms at the elbow and, moving them simultaneously, imitate that old, nearly broken-down train: "Chug . . . chug . . . chug . . ." Show them that this writing "chugs" because almost every sentence begins with the same word and all of the sentences are the same length. (Have students count the words in the sentence with you.)

Now project your second piece of writing. Here is mine:

I have two little dogs name Kenzie and Hattie.
They're fun to walk in the park.
After they've zipped around, saying hello to all the other dogs, they
bounce back to me for a treat.

Ask students, "Which of these pieces sounds better to the ear?" Guide them to understand that the varied beginnings and sentence lengths help to make the second piece more pleasant sounding. When writing is fluent, tell them, it sounds like a steady-moving train. Have them imitate the melodious sounds of a smooth-running train: "Clickerty, clickerty, clack, clickerky, clickerty, clack . . ." or even, "Cha-ch-sh, Cha-ch-sh, Cha-ch-sh . . ."

Suggest they try to write sentences that flow like a sweet-sounding train.

Extension: Read a book with train sound effects, such as *The Train Goes . . .* by William Bee (2007). Discuss the fluency of this text:

*Here is the school class off on a trip,
and the children yell,
'Please, sir, please, ma'am . . . are we there yet?'*

Admiring Fluent Writing

On Hand: A lyrical picture book, such as *The Night Is Singing* by Jacqueline Davies (2006), and the text from a favorite page written on chart paper or prepared to project on a screen or whiteboard.

Mini-Lesson: After reading the picture book from beginning to end, show students the text from a page or two. Read the pages aloud and invite students to tap the rhythm using their hands or feet.

Then ask them to make observations about the print. This is an open-ended exercise, so validate all responses. Students might notice the following:

- Some words rhyme.
- Some sentences are long: "The house is singing lullabies."
And some sentences are short: "Up you go." There are even one word sentences: "Sleepy?"

- There are dashes between some words: "tell-the-timing," "streak-and-fly." (Let students know that authors often like to create a string of words, like a beaded necklace.)
- Jacqueline Davies sometimes begins her stanzas with an action word: "Hear the hissing," or "Watch them go."

Encourage students to create works that flow like the words on these pages.

Extension: Suggest that students try tapping the rhythm of their own work. Do they like the way it sounds? What changes might they make?

Sentence Stretching

On Hand: Chart paper or board, marker, and if possible an individual whiteboard or clipboard for each student.

Mini-Lesson: Write the following sentence on the board: *I went for a walk.* Tell students that you would like them to imagine themselves on a walk. Tell them that you are going to ask a series of questions and that they should write down one or two words on their own board to answer the question. (If you teach kindergarten, or if you think your students will need more assistance, conduct this lesson as a whole-group interactive writing activity.) Ask:

- When did you walk?
- Who did you walk with?
- Where did you go?
- What did you see?
- Why did you go on the walk?

Now invite students to rewrite the initial sentence using as many of their answers as they wish. Tell them it's okay to leave one or two of the answers out. Encourage students to share their responses, which may resemble this sentence:

Yesterday I went walking with my mother down by the river to look for animal tracks, but we didn't see any.

Stretching sentences in this way gives students a new confidence and pride in their ability to construct lovely phrases.

Extension: Make a list titled "Words That Tell When" on chart paper and post it for students to refer to when looking for varied sentence beginnings. Your chart might include: *yesterday, today, tomorrow, after, before, earlier, on* (day of week), *in* (month), *when, long ago, back*. Students will no doubt want to keep adding to this list as they discover new ways of beginning sentences.

Song Writing

On Hand: *Astro Bunnies* by Christine Loomis (2001) or any other picture book based on a familiar song structure, a whiteboard or chart paper, and a marker.

Mini-Lesson: Read the book once just as you would any other picture book, then read it again. On the second read, point out to students that the author, Christine Loomis, wrote the words to the tune of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star." Sing a page or two:



It's always wonderful when you can extend students' understanding of craft by sharing an author's unique process. For example,

Jacqueline Davies reports that when writing *The Night Is Singing* (2006), a rhythm just came to her and she wrote according to the sound she heard in her head: da-da-DA-da, da-da-DA-da, da-da-DA-da, da-da-DA. You can find information about author's process online, either by visiting authors' Web sites or reading interviews on blogs. Simply search by an author's name.

Astro bunnies
See a star
Think they'd like to
Go that far

Now choose a classroom topic (jobs, an upcoming event, or writer's workshop, for example) and compose your own song to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle":

Writer's Workshop
 Every day
 We compose
 With words we play

Working with different language structures helps students break out of too-familiar sentence patterns and write with more fluency. Invite students to borrow the rhythm when composing.

Extension: Investigate picture book adaptations of the song "The Wheels on the Bus." You might include *The Seals on the Bus* by Lenny Hort (2000) and *Library Doors* by Toni Buzzeo (2008).

Writing with Refrains

On Hand: *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* by B.G. Hennessy (2006) or any other picture book that has a repetitive language.

Mini-Lesson: Read the story twice, and on the second reading, invite students to chime in on the repeating refrain. Then begin a chart of familiar books that have a refrain. Write "Title" on the left, and "Refrain" on the right. For example, your chart might look like the one in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5
Recognizing and
Recording
Refrains

Title	Refrain
<i>The Boy Who Cried Wolf</i> by B.G. Hennessy	Munch, munch, munch Baaaaa . . . No wolves in the . . .
<i>The Gingerbread Man</i> by Karen Schmidt	Run, run as fast as you can. . .
<i>Who Hops?</i> by Katie Davis	No they don't!
<i>A Visitor For Bear</i> by Bonny Becker	Small and gray and bright-eyed
<i>Trashy Town</i> by Andrea Zimmerman	Dump it in, smash it down, drive around the Trashy Town!
<i>School Picture Day</i> by Lynn Plourde	fidgeting, fiddling, fuddling, and foopling

While focusing on refrains, you might want to discuss the difference between intended repetition and overuse of familiar sentence patterns. Writers use repetition to create a poetic rhythm:

"Not I," said the Duck.

"Not I," said the Cat.

"Not I," said the Dog.

"Then I will," said the Little Red Hen. And she did.

Suggest that students read their work aloud to see if the repetition they use creates the sounds of poetry or whether it simply bores the reader.

Extension: Write the text of familiar chants and rhymes on chart paper for choral readings. For example, you might use the following:

Three Little Monkeys

Three little monkeys swinging from a tree,
Teasing Mr. Alligator, "Can't catch me!"
Along came Mr. Alligator slowly as can be
Then . . . SNAP!

Two little monkeys swinging from a tree,
Teasing Mr. Alligator, "Can't catch me!"
Along came Mr. Alligator slowly as can be
Then . . . SNAP!

One little monkey swinging from a tree,
Teasing Mr. Alligator, "Can't catch me!"
Along came Mr. Alligator slowly as can be
Then . . . SNAP!

Reader's Theater

On Hand: A copy of a reader's theater script for each student who will be reading.

Note: Scripts can be found on the Internet or in resource books such as *Once Upon a Time: Using Storytelling, Creative Drama, and Reader's Theater with Children in Grades PreK-6* by Judy Freeman (2007) and *Read! Perform! Learn! 2: 10 Reader's Theater Programs for Literacy Enhancement* by Toni Buzzeeo (2007). Some authors, such as Katie Davis (*Mabel the Tooth Fairy and How She Got Her Job* [2003]), post scripts of their books online. You can also create your own script using classic fairy tales.

Mini-Lesson: Have students perform a story for classmates. With reader's theater (also known as book-in-hand theater) students do not memorize lines, but read them aloud. Nevertheless, a rehearsal or two is recommended, as a practiced performance will increase enjoyment for both the audience and the readers. Encourage students to become the characters by using facial expressions, altered voices, and gestures. In other words, invite them to ham it up. Not only does reader's theater help improve students' writing fluency, it also aids in reading fluency.

Extension: Invite students to write their own scripts (original or based on published texts) to be performed with a classmate. Suggest they divide a sheet of paper in half and write each person's dialogue on one side. Then tear the sheet down the middle so the two may hold their parts

as they perform. (You may want to make a copy for students' folders before the tear.)

Poetry Slam

On Hand: *Barnyard Slam* by Dian Curtis Regan (2009).

Mini-Lesson: After reading *Barnyard Slam*, suggest students plan a poetry reading of their own. Invite families, another class, or school personnel to come and hear original student poems or favorite poems written by others. Push the desks together to create cafe tables and cover them with cloths. Suggest students wear bandanas—just like the animal poets in the story! Encourage them to practice reading their poems aloud and to concentrate on expression. Invite the audience to snap their fingers to show their appreciation of poems.

February

Focus: How Do I Include Quality Details?

In September you helped students focus their topics and include detail, and now the spiral has circled back to this topic. Barry Lane implores us to “explode the moment” (1999, 97). Lucy Calkins teaches us to zoom in on our small seed ideas (1994, 25) Learning to slow down time, to include details that go beyond the obvious or the general—this is the skill that, perhaps, has the greatest impact on writing. Why? Because doing so also increases voice, attention to word choice, and sentence fluency.

Each of us has a unique perspective on the world. By inevitably selecting some details over others, we not only help the reader to imagine—to fall into the work—we also help them to feel connected to the writer. That is, to us.

Focusing on the Details

On Hand: A wordless picture book, such as *Flotsam* by David Wiesner (2006).

Mini-Lesson: Begin telling this story by making up narration to go with the pictures, and model attention to the illustration details on each page. Point out that instead of saying “The boy saw a camera,” you will say, “Now soaking wet, with seaweed caught between his toes, the boy noticed a camera—also covered in seaweed—lying in the sand.”

After you have demonstrated this manner of telling for a few pages, invite individuals to come up and tell what happens next. Reinforce their ability to extract details from the illustrations and weave them into the telling.

Extension: Remind students that drawing is an excellent form of prewriting. Suggest they try drawing the next scene of their work to discover details they might like to use in their writing.

Another Look at Sensory Details

On Hand: *The Dirty Cowboy* by Amy Timberlake (2003) or any other picture book that uses strong sensory language.

Mini-Lesson: Read the story once, then prepare to reread the first page. Ask students to close their eyes and see if the writing causes them to feel as if they, too, are right there with the main character:

At the end of two fence lines and right at the rock called The Praying Iguana lived a cowboy in a tin-roofed shack.

Every morning, he'd call his dog, mount his horse, and spend the day tracking stray longhorn cattle on the New Mexico range.

Every evening, he'd stoke his fire and fry up some bacon, beans, and potatoes while whistling “The Streets of Laredo.”

Share one of your reactions: “I could feel the warmth of that campfire,” and invite students to do the same: “I could smell the bacon cooking,” “I could hear the whistling,” and so on.

Remind students that by selecting details that engage all of our senses, we help readers imagine themselves in the place of the writer or main character. Suggest students use an editing pencil to circle the sensory words in their own writing.

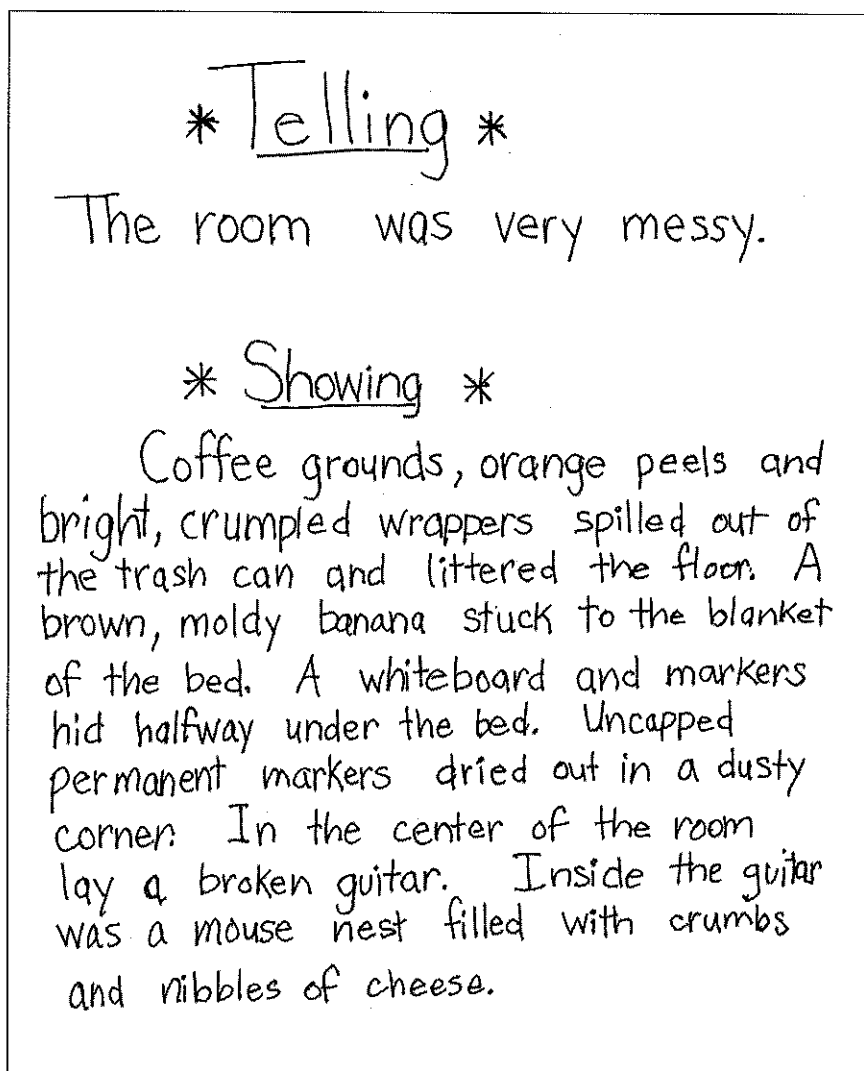
Extension: Invite students to search for passages in their reading that allow readers to imagine a sound, touch, smell, or taste.

Show, Don't Tell

On Hand: Whiteboard or chart paper.

Mini-Lesson: Remind students, "The job of the writer is to create a movie in the mind of a reader." Writers often do this by refraining from simply telling us how things are, but showing us instead. Write a simple telling sentence such as the one Molly Hogan wrote in Figure 5.6: "The room was very messy." Now invite students to collaborate in writing a paragraph that shows rather than tells the reader just what messy means.

Figure 5.6
Using Detail to
Create a Visual
Image



Extension: Read *Mrs. McBloom, Clean Up Your Classroom* by Kelly Dipucchio (2005). Project an illustration of Mrs. McBloom's amazing mess. With students, write a paragraph or two that describes her unique chaos.

Imagine That

On Hand: *Love the Baby* by Stephen L. Layne (2007) or any other book that shows, through actions, a character's emotions.

Mini-Lesson: Read text from the book that demonstrates how a character is feeling through action. For example, from *Love the Baby* you might read: "So I built a tower for Baby . . . and then I knocked it down!" Ask, "How is this big brother feeling in this moment?" After students have provided responses, point out that the author did not use words such as *mad*, *angry*, *frustrated*, or *jealous*. But we, the readers, know that this is how the brother is feeling because of his actions. The details the author selected *show* us how the character is feeling.

Next, ask students to imagine they have just learned that they won the school art contest. Say, "Your picture will be framed and hung in the front hall. It will be the first piece of art seen as we come into the building. How do you react?"

Invite volunteers to come up and demonstrate a reaction. Invite others to provide the words that show through actions how the student is feeling. Remind them to stay away from words that tell, such as *happy*, *excited*, and *thrilled*:

Teacher: Kara just learned that she won the school art contest.

Student response: She jumped into the air and shouted, "Yes!"

You might want students to act out several scenarios. Here are other suggestions:

- Your babysitter has just accused you of doing something you didn't do. You say, "But . . ." She interrupts you and tells you to go to your room. How do you exit?
- A hurricane blows over a favorite tree—one that you've climbed countless times, the one where you built your tree fort. How do you react?

Suggest that students provide details to show how they or their main characters are feeling through actions.

Extension: Provide students with sentences that tell how a character feels and invite them to rewrite the sentences to show how a character feels. Have them share their rewrites at the next day's morning meeting.

Tiny Stitches

On Hand: *I Could Do That: Esther Morris Gets Women the Vote* by Linda Arms White (2005), whiteboard or chart paper, and a marker.

Mini-Lesson: After reading *I Could Do That*, tell students that you admire the author's ability to slow time down, to show us all of the actions that occur while accomplishing a small task. Point out that Linda Arms White could have simply written, "Esther learned to sew by watching her mother." But instead she wrote:

When Esther was eight, she watched her mother sew a fine seam. The needle pulled thread in and out, in and out, tracking tiny even stitches across the fabric. Esther felt her hands mimicking her mother's. "I could do that," she said. And she did.

Now model writing a paragraph about a simple task that you do, but break it down into smaller actions. For example, you might write about the manner in which you make your bed, feed the dog, or eat an ear of corn. Chances are students will want to tell you about the way in which they do these routines. We connect in the sharing of details.

Extension: Ask students to write about a simple task, such as brushing their teeth. Tell them they must slow the writing down to fill an entire page. Once students have practiced unpacking a moment in this way, they will be able to apply the skill to their own writing.

Quality Details in Expository Writing

On Hand: *Ice Bear: In the Steps of the Polar Bear* by Nicola Davies (2005).

Mini-Lesson: Tell students that details help to make writing more interesting. Write this sentence on the board: "Polar bears stay warm when it's cold out-

side.” Tell students that this sentence, without any quality details, is a “snoozer”—the kind of writing that lulls us to sleep. Then read to them from Davies’s book:

No frost can steal Polar Bear’s heat. It has a double coat: one of fat, four fingers deep, and one of fur which has an extra trick for beating cold. Its hairs aren’t really white, but hollow, filled with air, to stop the warmth escaping, and underneath, the skin is black to soak up heat.



Two other exemplary nonfiction texts model the use of quality details:

Stars Beneath Your Bed: The Surprising Story of

Dust by April Pulley Sayer (2005):

Dust is made everywhere, every day.

A flower drops pollen.

A dog shakes dirt from its fur.

A butterfly flutters,

and scales fall off its wings.

It’s a Butterfly’s Life by Irene Kelly (2007):

A butterfly has four wings. Each wing has shimmering scales that overlap like shingles on a roof.

Take a moment to discuss the unique details presented on this page. Tell students that readers love to be shown details they might have missed or never before had the opportunity to learn. Ask, “What have you noticed that others may not have observed?” Prepare to be astounded as students tell you the number of black tiles in the hall, the spider that’s made a web below the water fountain, or the way in which their music teacher clears her throat when the room gets noisy. Encourage them to continue observing the world and to include these details in their writing.

Extension: Provide students with palm-size notebooks and encourage them to record unique observations that they can include in their writing. When students do transfer a detail from their notebook to their writing, invite them to coteach the next day’s mini-lesson by modeling the collecting and incorporating of information.

Staying on Track

On Hand: One or more copies of writing in which the writer has added irrelevant details. For example:

Yesterday my friend came over to play. We played with matchbox cars on the sidewalk. My friend had the sport cars and the convertibles, but I didn’t mind because I had the camper and it is my favorite car of all. I like it

because it has the most doors that open and a tent that pops up. I had my new sneakers on, even though they are too big for me still.

Mini-Lesson: Remind students that revision doesn't always mean adding details; sometimes we have to remove details that cause our writing to veer off track. Invite your class (or small groups of students, if you prefer) to stand and form a train by placing their hands on the shoulders of the student in front of them. Tell students that they will listen to a piece of writing as they move forward as a train. When the writing goes off track, they, the train, should halt.

When students regroup on the rug, ask them what a writer should do if he or she has added unnecessary details. Help them understand that all writers need to cross off the bits that don't belong.

Extension: Project your own writing in which you have crossed out words, sentences, or even whole paragraphs. Talk to students about the decisions you made.

Beware the Adjective

On Hand: Chart paper or whiteboard and a marker.

Mini-Lesson: "What do you do when students begin to overload their writing with details?" teachers often ask. The previous lesson, *Staying on Track*, addresses this problem, but I often find that what primary teachers are referring to when they say "too much description" is an overabundance of adjectives.

Adjectives are not necessarily details. At times the right adjective can provide the perfect picture: *yellow rubber boots*, for example, but words like *pretty*, *good*, *excellent*, and *awesome* create absolutely no picture at all. I've witnessed many a teacher conduct a word choice lesson that encourages students to retire words like *good* only to see sentences like this follow:

My soccer team is really, really, really awesome!!!!

Model the elimination of vague adjectives (and adverbs) where you can. Project an initial attempt:

My sweet grandmother bakes the most awesome cookies!

Remind students of “show, don’t tell” and rewrite:

“Oh, I’m so glad you’re here!” my grandmother says as I walk through her back door. “Sit down here and I’ll pour you some tea.” I have no sooner sat down when she puts a plate of chocolate peanut butter cookies down in front of me. I can tell that the centers are gooey and the edges are crisp—just the way I like them.

Discuss the difference between the first sentence and the following paragraph. Point out that awesome doesn’t make our taste buds water, whereas words like *gooey* just might.

Extension: Post a list titled “Beware of These Adjectives” and record those that are too general.

March

Focus: How Do I Organize a Story? and How Do I End My Piece?

In October you and your class explored the concept of using an organizational structure, that is, the understanding that all writing has a structure—bones if you will—that helps the reader follow along (and helps the writer know in what direction to go next). This month students revisit organization, this time taking a closer look at sequencing and the pattern of story.

There are many patterns of story and they come from varied cultural traditions. One of the most common patterns (often the pattern of folk and fairy tales) is the pattern of three. I teach students this pattern while being careful to acknowledge it is one pattern and not by any means the *only* pattern. I teach it because it helps students recognize the rhythm and pacing of story. It gives their stories a direction, suspense, and a satisfying ending. It helps students move away from the typical “and then, and then, and then . . .” style of storytelling (which often ends abruptly when the writer has become bored with the topic)